SLICE OF LIFE

A Hades Mini Zine

WELCOME

In anticipation of the release of Hades II, we decided to create *Hades: Slice of Life* as an outlet for contributors to show their love and appreciation for the games. Themed around showing bits and pieces of the characters' life within and outside of the game, we hoped to let creators have free reign to express themselves when it comes to the their love for Hades and Hades II.

As this is a free zine, we would like to thank all contributing artists, writers and creators that have brought life (literally!) to *Hades: Slice of Life*. We'd also like to thank you for picking up a copy of the Hades Minizine and we hope you enjoy each piece of media presented and that it stokes the flame of your passion for Hades and Hades II.

Good gaming!

Your Mods
Iiris, Stefanyeah, and Zagreus

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ABSTRACT (PSYCHOPOMP)

This work contains vivid descriptions of imagery and events related to death and the god who governs it. Take care of yourself!

Whatever mortal said "nothing is certain except death and taxes" forgot to mention another key part of Existence–the inevitable paperwork along with it all.

take me home to repose,
rangy runner facing flowers
blooming at the door!

It was bad enough, being fashioned a deadly god. Thanatos scoffed as short silver-silk bangs fluttered with his terse exhale. While there was small comfort in those aware of his true nature beyond the mask of 'Death Incarnate', it could not be so with the numerous scrolls of the Underworld. *Unfeeling, brittle, sharp as Demeter's winter, just as numbing to the mind.* Lord Hades had quotas, and expected meticulous records on top of guiding souls to sibilant brother Charon; stress headaches alone would cause shrill shrieks of ever slender Hypnos to ring out more than was comfortably tolerable.

Glancing at himself in the West Wing mirror, a muted groan escaped the god's clenched teeth. *I look like Death indeed. Dry skin, bitter lips, dull eyes... cliché, much?* Fragile documents sat securely in the crook of a slate pale arm, inky hood askew, polished sword shimmering dully from the flames of a nearby torch. Clicking his tongue briskly, the deity turned away to the matters he could control. *Let's fill these scant records before*

being summoned topside.

drape worn wool sheets
over blood soaked skin, i'll taste
your darkened depths;

Scowling at the sun, the chthonic divinity pulled his clothes tight against bitter winds that whipped across winter-worn Crete. Focusing for a moment, he discovered a child no older than seven, limply swaddled with thin rags spread on frosty ground. *Poor thing, left to die from causes born of desperation. Cursed by godly quarrels.*

Lips pulled tight, Thanatos gently ran a hand across the young mortal's clammy forehead, coming away with a gossamer butterfly, tiny wings unfurling in harsh elements foreign to its form. Throwing a benevolent glance at the spirit fluttering nervously on his slender fingers, his other hand slid to close empty, corpse-dull eyes. *Don't worry, little one; my hands shall carry you safely.* With a soft whistle, the ghostly insect settled - solemn bells echoing suddenly as immortal flesh vanished to follow hushed calls begging for his presence.

let me know ambrosia, born
from chapped lips
smoothed by pomegranate-

One became two became four became eight; it did not matter when, how, or who. A young mother pleaded for her son to stay. Twins came together, the elder guided the younger even as shades. Hushed weeping reached divine ears at a palace where the sickly daughter of beloved rulers settled primly on a pale palm. No difference in care was considered, nor malice for the past – the same tender hand gathered each fragile essence

of mortality, watching them weave together a verdant display for his gaze alone, dappled in the vibrant hues of life.

Despite the somewhat draining duties thrust upon his divine mind, Death Incarnate found his work essential, if not necessary. *At the point of passing, he was known as kind. That was enough, it must be enough. Long hours, minimal breaks, and parchment be damned - they can't do anything without me.* Hints of a smile graced a mouth unused to the motion, forcing a path to gentler thoughts. *Treat everything as normal, then go find the one that makes you whole. He craves you; spare a* ***few*** *moments to indulge that mutual sin.*

in the aether flowing freely,
drawing breath as one
melding mutual glory.

Thanatos caught up to Zagreus in Elysium, the latter a dark-haired god soaked in blood and ashes from the numerous Flame Wheels slain previous to this chamber. Startling eyes filled with joy, a tan hand lifted in greeting; his chipper voice called *"THAN!"* as unruly spikes were brushed out of the visage of one adored entirely. Customary banter was exchanged, ritual battle fought and lost - for the ever lively opponent slay far more than four Brightswords and a Soul Catcher.

Holding out his hand to give Life, the death god was surprised when his partner set a small perfumed scroll in his hand, snatching the heart-shaped boost and dashing away. *Odd. He is one to blather on and reassure all is well.* With the usual sombre clash of entrance, green light flashed as the House of Hades welcomed the immortal home. He floated in his customary spot overlooking the Styx, fumbling with red silk that encased the message so unceremoniously dropped into his hand.

"reborn for love's tender ache"

Inside, suspiciously smelling of roses, lay a poem in familiar princely scrawl.

THE GARDEN OF CHAOS

The beating sun above them should be warm against their skin, it should light up their skin with a thousand pinpricks of varying levels. Instead, they feel nothing at all, peering through a loop in time, a gap in the very fabric of the universe. A young goddess walks around her garden, a basket hanging off of her arm, swinging whenever she takes a step. Golden hair falls over her shoulder in a braid, a red ribbon wrapped loosely through it, replacing the green one usually resting in its place.

Persephone hums a gentle tune to herself- one they do not know, and cannot pretend to- as she digs her bare hands into the soil, dragging up vegetables and sprouting wildflowers in their place. Asphodels come to life in the everlasting soil of a garden perpetually alive and animals find homes there they would not anywhere else in the winter storms blasting ever onwards past the confines of the garden. They do not understand her particularly well, and have never wanted to, but this space is not theirs alone anymore, and perhaps some life would bring joy to their breathing companion. Silently they watch her wipe sweat off her brow, hands planted firmly on her hips when she takes a moment to look over that which she has brought to life through love and adoration alone.

The garden is a magnificent entity, thrumming with life and singing of the beauty which comes with it. Greens surround themselves with blues and pinks, vegetables meant to be eaten flourish into grander versions of themselves. Never have they seen such brightness before, or smelt such vibrant scents come from only one place. Whilst they do not feel bad, perse, for

they enjoy the world they have created themselves within their realm- the stars which glitter endlessly in the night, the water which remains ever still and never harsh. Even the pillars which jut from the paving is something they have come to care for. This place is a home they built for themselves, fitted perfectly to their needs and their alone. The one sharing it with them never complains, even finding comfort here when he most needs it, but Chaos knows all. They can see clearly their realm is no match to the gilded halls of Olympus.

So they watch the goddess of spring with more than just a little curiosity, memorizing the shape of the seeds she plants deep within the earth, taking to heart the smell of the flowers which she braids into her hair. The green, they cannot do, but they can almost certainly make an attempt to replicate the soil coating her arms and legs. They purse their lips, making a mental note of everything they must create within this small area of theirs. She does not stop even once the sun no longer shines brightly in the sky, and even Chaos finds themselves in awe when the flowers around her begin to glimmer as though stars in the night sky. The pumpkins shine with light from within, the sunflowers turn gently, emitting light as they do. The splendour of it all is almost enough to knock the hypothetical breath out of their hypothetical lungs.

The goddess retires after some time, still humming a song they do not know. Perhaps they should ask someday- though likely not. Slowly the glow of the flowers disappears, and the vegetables retire for the night in the same way their goddess does.

In an instant the tear in space and time is sealed, and Chaos rests back, lips pursed, thoughts bouncing around the confine of their mind. They stare into the abyss that is their home,

turning their gaze to the marble tiling which serves as a repose for those who seldom visit. Perhaps their daughter would cherish something else here as well, perhaps she would visit more were they to bring forth life. It has been many an eon now since Chaos has thought to bring life to the world, already entangled as they are with the forces which make up the entirety of the universe, and so it is strange to try once more. It feels as though muscle memory when they lift their hands, eyes shining brightly in the dimly lit world, as they bring forth life.

A seed appears in their hand. Certainly they are doing it correctly, and yet it is so... small. They frown, picking it up with their thumb and pointer finger, holding it above them the same way they do when holding the Cosmic Egg. Even that is larger than this. It is an odd pink hue, pulsing in their hand, radiating warmth. It is certainly a seed, and it must certainly be correct. Gently, they place it back onto the palm of their hand, taking a moment to create a few more, proud of themselves for the second nature with which they create such things.

"What are you doing?" A voice coos, bringing with it the light of beating hearts, the warmth of love. "Oooo*oo*, are those seeds? I didn't know we could make them down here."

"I can create most anything, little dove." Chaos hums, looking up at Eros, who floats as close to their face as he believes necessary, feet crossed over one another. They look at the seeds once more, lifting them to be at the small god's eye level. "I thought you might care to plant them, to bring forth life in this space you now share with me."

He blinks, perhaps confused, but takes the seeds gingerly.

Chaos watches carefully as he inspects them, a look of uncertainty gracing his features, before he shrugs, perhaps deeming whatever thought he conceived is no longer worthy of thought. In an instant, Chaos brings forth soil amongst the marble, watching with fascination as the seeds are planted deep within the bowels of the earth. Eros does not do it the same way Persephone had, and rather he cringes every time he pushes his hands into the soil, removing his hands after every seed. He inspects his nails, grumbles softly of the ways in which the polish has chipped.

The plants which will sprout from them will please him at least, of that they are certain. He seems to enjoy adorning his hair with them whenever he can.

"When will they grow?" He asks, looking up at them from the further reaches of their realm.

"Thirteen nights until they flourish, if I am correct." Which they are, though neither of them feels the need to say so.

He nods, flying up to rest amidst their hair, and perhaps he falls into a slumber if his quiet snores are anything to go by. They hum, watching the plants with interest, hoping to see them flourish soon.

"They're not supposed to look like that."

"I see naught wrong with them."

"Nothing wrong with them? They have eyes!" Eros squawks, floating as far away from the plants as he is physically able.

They watch him shudder, frowning a little in confusion. He looks at them, waving his hands. "They're not supposed to have eyes, Chaos!"

"They are a little different, that is all." They retort, more than a little offended by his distaste of the flowers. This is why they do not do nice things anymore. "I do not understand where your dislike for them stems from."

Eros sighs, resting his feet against the marble, poking one of the plants with his bow, gagging when it makes what he seems to believe is a horrid sound. "I'm not saying it's awful, I'm saying it's not a plant."

"The daughter of Demeter would disagree, she would treat them the same." Silence lingers over the two of them for a moment, until Eros sighs once more and places his bow on his back. "You are going, then?"

"For a little bit, yes."

Chaos watches him leave, turning their attention to their plants once more, now a little more sadly than before. They are not perfect, that is true, but to hate them so is certainly not what they expected. Carefully they lift a finger, moving it closer to gently touch the plant. Certainly it is not perfect, and certainly it is not quite a plant and rather a living organism- one more akin to a human, if one is to be specific. Perhaps this was a terrible idea. They heave a sigh- a painfully Olympian thing to have picked up from Eros- and look away from their plants, focusing instead on the stars which glitter endlessly in their void.

The peace is broken eventually by the sound of Night's

approach, though something else has changed that they do not understand. Chaos turns, staring at their greatest creation in all of time itself, blinking at the small goddess standing at her side. Eros floats over to them proudly, speaking too quickly for them to understand- they focus solely on the goddess, who they never thought would look so divine still in such an obscure place. She holds a basket over her arm, looking around curiously even when she laughs at something their daughter says.

"It is a pleasure to be allowed into your home, Master Chaos." She bows, her voice reminding them vaguely of the soothing feeling of dandelions blowing in the wind. "I have been told you have... a bit of a predicament with your plants."

"They have eyes." Eros mumbles, earning a look from Chaos.

"Be welcome here, daughter of Demeter. It seems both Nyx and the dove have brought you here." They look over at the plants, watching her follow their gaze. Instead of shrinking away from them, she lights up brighter than the sun, and lets out a startled laugh.

"Oh my! What interesting looking plants." Before Eros can protest, she speaks again. "For they're most definitely plants, the soil grew them herself. How lovely!"

The plants turn their attention to the goddess, the pink of them fluctuating in the lighting. Thousands of eyes stare into her soul as she steps close, and Chaos watches in wonder as the plants lean closer to her, attempting to move tentatively closer to her, pushing into her touch. Beneath her hands they grow further still, leaves sprouting from the earth they were born in.

"Give them some care, and I'd wager they'll be wonderful plants." Persephone turns, holding a bag up to Chaos. "And these, for you, so Lord Eros has something to plant without it looking at him." She laughs, pressing the bag of seeds into Chaos' much larger outstretched hand.

She does not stay long, but Chaos learns much from her, watching Eros place new seeds into the soil. Soon vines will wrap around the pillars, dandelions and roses and blackcurrant bushes will sprout to life in their otherwise silent realm, Eros will laugh bashfully, and attempt to weave a crown of flowers large enough for them. Perhaps, Chaos decides, this idea was not so terrible after all.

OKAY, BOOMER

The temple...the *church*, rather, is more vast than the ones built in his name. Which Ares finds a little funny if this god's followers fancy that he favors those of humbler roots. But the walls are filled with tall windows, and the ceiling is high and adorned with polished chandeliers. As for the altar, it's backed with stained windows depicting a story of men and women in colorful robes and gleaming halos, the same ones stood on their pedestals here and there around the place.

To the crucified figure in the middle, Ares comes down to one knee and draws a cross over himself.

The pews are all empty, except for the third one near the front towards the right. Ares chooses the one behind it, sitting just off the shoulder of the young mortal praying with her forehead pressed to her clasped hands. *Dear God, please,* she tells him; he's probably not this 'God' she's imagining, but as the mortals say, gods come in many forms. And *is* he not one and this one not his domain? *Please help us reach our last stretch goal because everyone worked so hard and I think we deserve it. That would also mean that we would be able to donate so much to the war veterans and I think that would make so many people happy.* Ares reckons the same.

He hides his smile behind his hand, but just barely. This one won't see him, anyway, if she turns to look.

And I hope that everyone ignores the EspiVant Zine, as well, the mortal goes on. *Our charity is a greater cause, and that EspiVant Zine supports proshippers, anyway. I think any money that goes to a proshipper is such a waste when it can be used for something that's more unquestionably moral. Right, God?*

Well, Ares supposes. He's not the most moral god in the mountain *for sure,* but this war she's waging cares so little for that, anyway.

I promise to go back to church every Sunday after I finish all my duties as finance mod. All this I ask in the mighty name of Jesus... She crosses herself and gets up.

She pays Ares no mind when she hurries out of the church.

username: @barraphen_dni
profile name: barraphen_dni

if i were an espivant shipper, i would be super concerned about the @esvaauzine. do the mods even know who their contributors are? or that they're working with a barraphen shipper? cuz if they did, then i don't understand why they aren't dropping @blujjack yet (1/?)

Aphrodite cackles—inasmuch as the goddess of beauty can cackle. "Oh, my goodness. You, the fearsome Ares, really are taking sides in a *shipping war*?" She's bouncing on her heels and clapping her hands on her way to one of the sparkling glass booths that surround them, laden with masks, jars of cream, vials of ampoule and whatnot.

"A war is a war is a war." Ares braces his elbow on the cool surface when he catches up with her. She's lifting a tiny dropper to the bright lights, heedless of the hardworking mortal fixing up her display on the other side. "I care not for the specifics as long as there is lust and glory."

"Oh, there is lust here, for sure." A few drops fall from the dropper onto the side of Aphrodite's dainty fist. She gives it an experimental whiff, then rubs it in circles over her skin. "Love and lust, after all, are the root and the fruit of everything." She sniffs her fist again before she slips the dropper back into its vial and walks away. "And these little fictional romances are no different."

"What?" Ares has to blink at that bit of information. "You mean to say that this 'shipping war' you speak of..."

"Oh, you didn't know?" Aphrodite giggles, standing at another booth. "These mortals are fighting over people that don't even exist. You can say it's all about ideas *and* ideals." From the glass top, she picks up another vial, admiring it as a child of her own. "Much like these beauty trends. This land called Paris already makes many of these miracle serums, and yet they still hunger for the ones that hail from far-off Korea. Why do you think that is?" That's a quiz, if Ares knows of any.

Lucky for him, Aphrodite loves him enough to throw a hint. "Because a certain goddess allows them to toy with such idealistic ideas, correct?"

Aphrodite's eyes twinkle when she looks at him again. "Correct, my love."

username: @blujjack
profile name: i write smut for croffles

i just don't understand why people don't just block and move on anymore. like i get that barraphen is age gap and people think that's freaky and that's fine! but what's not fine is creating a burner acc just to

bother a zine acc that has NOTHING to do with barraphen

The firelight from the decorative sconce in-between them is practically reflected on the glint of Athena's smile. "This one is wise," she remarks, setting down Ares' phone beside her plate to trade it for her fork. "They are neither defensive nor aggressive. And yet, they are steadfast in their participation in this book, as well as their principles as an admirer of the work. Too bad you've gone and granted your favor to this..." She squints at the tiny screen again. "Racsalarcas?" It's such a silly name. But then, mortals are quite the silly folks, after all.

Ares sweeps the barbecued rib in his hand to shrug. "Come now, hers is a noble cause. As you see, this...BarraPhen, styled with a capital B and P, enjoy something of a pseudo-paternal relationship in the original text. And so my favored mortal is quite concerned that the younger generation may be led astray." Athena has to put her glass of sherry down so she doesn't spill it when she throws her head back and laughs. "And so she prayed for guidance, and as a war-god, I listened!"

"If I didn't know any better, you are simply doing this to vent your frustrations out on Father!" Athena picks up her glass again. "Well, I suppose there's a reason why you're still enjoying this."

"What's not there to enjoy, after all?" Ares chuckles, relishing the meat between his teeth. "Though..." he sighs, tossing the bone to his plate where it can join the other ones already picked clean. "I suppose I could stand to enjoy it more."

"By what means?" Athena raises an eyebrow. "Bloodshed? You just said they were fictional."

"More's the pity." Ares picks up his glass of sangria. "But without bloodshed, it's all just…warhorns and battlecries. Which is all this rascally mortal of mine seems to know."

"And isn't that because it's your job as her patron god to inspire her?" Athena scoffs, biting a tomato from her fork. "Or is this brand of war simply too new for your ancient soul?"

Ares snorts at her with derision. "You question my power, sister?" He brings his glass to his smirk.

Pauses midway, his brows quirking and his eyes passing curiously to the black device lying innocuously at his side.

username: @racsalarcas
profile name: racsalarcas; trapped in ramiphen rot

so i just want to send out a massive THANK YOU to everyone who supported us at @ramiphen_zine!!!!!! modding for this project is such a DREAM and just reminds me why I love ramiphen SO MUCH. all of you who bought the zine just proves that ramiphen is CANON like we always say (4/?)

Zagreus is *gawking* at his phone, and the bigger his eyes grow, the wider Ares' grin spreads, as well. "Blood and darkness, it's a *battlefield* in here!"

"As it should be." Ares' laughter is quiet, compared to the noisy whir of electric fans, the tricycles roaring here and there past the open gate, and the radio blasting from the cheap counter at the end of the cramped room, where the lines *'it's been raining in Manila'* repeat in eternal damnation. Never mind that it's decidedly *not* raining in Manila where the heat feels like Hell has annexed it as a fifth level.

His dessert is all but a melted puddle of purple at the bottom of the plastic glass when he sets it aside. Zagreus' choice is one that comes with red jelly, brown sugar syrup and large white pearls. Forgotten, though it is, in favor of the action raging behind the screen.

"Eighty-nine comments, two-thousand nine-hundred fifty-three reshares, and six-*thousand* four-hundred forty-one likes…" Zagreus whistles. "And they're all just fighting! No one's even talking about the zine, anymore, it's all just…trash-talking ships *and* real people alike."

"It's quite repulsive, isn't it?" Ares chuckles again when Zagreus sets his phone aside, though he can't quite look away from it. "Though I admit that I am not in the position to complain. Blood and death will always be the best means of war, but I suppose such noisy fighting can well be considered a part of modern warfare."

"No kidding. Do you have any idea how many alliances just ended and how many armies were raised by that single post you made? I mean," Zagreus flips his hand, "by way of the mortal, of course. So, what's your next step?" The rickety table, protected only by a flimsy sheet of plastic, creaks when the Prince of the Underworld braces his thick arms against it.

"Well, I…" Ares crosses his arms in front of him while Zagreus wraps his large hand around his cheap glass to stir the melted ice and sweet syrup with his straw. "Must sadly await Lord-and-Lady Blujjack's retaliation. *Or* surrender."

Zagreus nods, angling his plastic straw to suck through the gap.

"My army has made great strides towards victory, but I will need to know the enemy's actions to know how to further it–"

Zagreus chokes in his drink.

Ares' brows furrow when Zagreus progresses to coughing and beating his chest, and soon enough, to clawing his throat. Though whatever it is that's stuck there seems disinclined to leave him in peace. "My kin?" Ares frowns, sitting up a little straighter.

Zagreus' tongue is lolling out, but still his words are missing and his coughs are starting to sound thinner, and breathier.

When he falls off his chair, the concrete floor bursts into a pool of blood, the hands of the dead seeking out the living, though they stay well away from Ares who sits speechless to their presence. It doesn't take him much longer to comprehend this sudden development, though, when he catches Zagreus raising one finger at him, as if to say *Give me a minute*, as he sinks into the Styx. Ares reckons he'll require more than a minute to get back up into the surface again.

But having fetched its prince, all that red seeps through the floor. And then it's as if Zagreus never existed beyond his empty dishes and that treacherous cup of poison that has caused his demise. The electric fans are still whirring, a jeepney rattles by noisily, and the radio is now playing a particular commercial about whitening beauty soaps on repeat.

Ares reaches for Zagreus' forsaken dessert and sips from the straw. "Mm," he hums, chewing at the soft sinkers as he looks at the cup approvingly. "I daresay I like this better than what I had."

username: @blujjack
profile name: i write smut for croffles

really starting to regret buying that ramiphen zine but my friends are in it so i can't just not support it, ykno?? and it's for a great cause but... idk, thx to all the drama, i kind of lost my love for ramiphen. am I overreacting tho?

anyway, i'll be on priv for a bit sorry

"What!" Hermes shrieks, while the rest of the coffee shop ignores him. Ares, for his part, inclines a brow as his brother goes on to reveal that, "Awww, but I love Blujjack's RamiPhen fics!"

"What?" Now it's Ares' turn to show some surprise, his cold cup of coffee landing softly onto the narrow counter when he pulls it from his lips. "You are aware of these ships? And not only that, you engage in them!"

"Well, why not!" Hermes cries, shrugging with the phone still in his right hand, his left bearing his tall cup of creamy, sugary coffee with all the shots of espresso he could ask. "These fics exist because once upon a time, some mortals watched a show and decided that two of the men in it should kiss more often. So they printed out tiny little zines, and sent them out to their friends and whoever else cared to read about these two men kissing!"

"Well," Ares shrugs, bringing the straw to his lips again, "I suppose if you put it that way, these tales would certainly be within your domain."

"Hey, you're not the only one taking your job seriously here."

Hermes affixes his elbows on the green counter again, slurping through his own straw. Down below, the lights have changed, and the expanse of gray, decorated by broken lines forming a massive white X in the middle, begins to fill with people. From where they stand, the mortals aren't unlike crawling ants. "Which reminds me! The reason why I called you is because I wanna show you this thing. It just came in the mail."

"Hm?" Ares watches as the excitable god dumps his phone and his coffee onto the counter so he can unearth a gorgeous book from his loaded satchel. It's thick, its cover decorated by gold inlay that swirls around a happy couple in an embrace. The title reads *Sail Away* and the subtitle reads, *A RamiPhen Zine.*

"Those tiny little zines I mentioned? They look like that now." Hermes picks up his drink and his phone to start scrolling again, while Ares browses through the contents of the book. If Hermes procured his own copy, should he thank him for lending to his and his mortal's victory, after all? "And this one was shipped out to all corners of the globe, too! I bet you wish you pre-ordered a copy now, huh?" Hermes giggles behind his straw. "Oh shoot," he says suddenly, his straw falling from his mouth. "Now *this* one's just hot off the press!"

Ares peers closely at his screen when he shows it to him.

username: @blujjack
profile name: SEE PINNED POST

i really hate to do this, but someone used my credit card and address to order 50pcs of seafood pizza and sent them TO ME. as if a shrimp didn't send me to the ER once! but i just don't have the money to pay for them so i need help

How easily the best wine from Bordeaux becomes cheap once it's poured into the dinghy shot glasses sponsored by the convenience store, beside which they have convened at an hour mortals tend to classify as being 'ungodly'. Regardless, Ares and Dionysus toast and finish their drinks in one measly gulp.

"Really don't see how these mortals don't die of thirst from these teeny-tiny kylikes, man," Dionysus muses out loud as he refills his and Ares' glasses again. "Well, you don't look like you're up for a feast, anyway, so more for me, yeah?"

"Please," Ares snorts, stirring the artificial red soup in his styrofoam bowl with his wooden chopsticks, though it yields him nothing but rehydrated noodle and vegetable bits floating to the surface. He leaves it alone, then, and reaches for the coin-shaped rice cakes in the plastic case in the middle. "I reckon I would have more need of the wine than you, drunkard."

"Hey, you wanna try and put that in your soup for that extra kick, yeah?"

Dionysus had caught him with the rice cake almost in his mouth, but since he possesses superior knowledge with these things, Ares yields to his advice and drops it into his bowl. Once soaked, he fishes it out with his chopsticks and eats it whole. He's not sure about the effect, though, it's just rice, crispy vegetable fillings, and some watery tang and spice from the soup.

Ares casts him an ugly look.

Dionysus raises his hands in peace. "Look, that's how they do it in the K-dramas, okay? I was just looking out for you, man. Turn your frown upside down, y'know!"

"You are speaking to me in tongues," Ares sighs, raising his wine to his lips. "You really are the god of madness."

"*And* wine *and* theater," Dionysus points out with delight, filling up Ares' glass again just so he could force a toast. They empty both drinks in a single motion, and Dionysus lets the wine flow once more. "I gotta tell you, though. For someone who just won the war, your face looks like a tragedy."

Ares scoffs. "It's certainly no comedy." He folds his great arms on the cheap plastic table where he tosses his right hand to shrug. "It was a flawless victory. For her final strike, my wise mortal used her knowledge of the enemy's weaknesses against them. So effective was it that the enemy couldn't retaliate." Another sigh as he reaches for the tub of kimchi when it was offered to him. "I should be ecstatic."

"You should be insufferable, I agree," Dionysus replies with a mouthful of rice. "Well, what's throwing you off, then? If it ain't the means, then it's surely gotta be the end, yeah? So what is it? Wine ran out before the feast?"

"The feast," Ares chuckles, smiling wryly.

He faces Dionysus again, his brows furrowing with realization. "Now that you've mentioned it, no feast was had."

"Hey, there we go!" Dionysus laughs, reaching to him with his glass again. "No feast was ha–hey, now, hold it right there." The way he's eying Ares, someone may as well have meddled

with the Fates and sent everything off-kilter. He retrieves his glass in his surprise, just when Ares was going to tap it with his. "What do you mean there's no feast, man? That's like the worst war ever!"

"I'll thank you not to insult my wars. But there *is* no feast." Ares knocks their glasses together, anyway. "No feasts, no plunder, or much less any gloating." He drains his glass. "My mortal won, and yet her silence paints her as an honorless coward."

"You sayin' she cheated on the whole war thing?" Dionysus tosses the wine into his mouth.

"Or perhaps, I am simply not as fitted to this method of warfare as I had presumed." Ares tuts quietly. "I thought that in spite of the odd circumstances, this new kind of war won't be so different from those that have preceded it." He chuckles, passing his glass to Dionysus for the fresh wine. "And yet I am left dissatisfied..."

The plastic chair creaks under Dionysus' weight when he leans back to stretch his arms. "Well, so what're you planning to do now, man?" And therein lies the other tragedy: Ares hadn't thought that far yet.

Though he supposes it's because he's never had to—not now and not ever.

Ares looks at his blank phone with a slow smirk, then scrapes it off the table as he pushes himself up to his feet.

"Hey," Dionysus spreads his arms outwards, "where are you going, man?"

"I am a war-god, Dionysus." He doesn't even bother to grace him with a look when he waves goodbye. "I go where there is war."

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Thank you for your continuous support for the @ramiphen_zine.

As a result of our investigation re: the misuse of private buyer details, we have decided to remove @racsalarcas and her contribution from the project.

We thank everyone for their cooperation and patience.

ARTEMIS'S AID

When the forest speaks to Artemis, its words carry more weight than any of the blundering drama from Mount Olympus. The gentle sway of the wind through the trees tells her so much of the likelihood of a successful hunt, whereas the bloated bickering of who has offended who between her relatives tells her nothing of use. The snapping of a twig can let her know the location of her prey and how wary said prey may or may not be of her presence, while the stomping tantrum of Zeus tells her nothing except that she would rather be anywhere than sharing a palace with the mighty ruler of all the gods.

For all the palace may be so large that a mortal mind could never fathom it, to Artemis, it feels confined. She feels as trapped as a quail with its foot in a snare. Out here, her forests are endless and her hunts could also be so.

...At least, in an ideal world, they could be endless.

Artemis tries not to frown too openly as a boon comes crashing down from the mighty mountain above, causing the deer she had been stalking to flit away through the trees and out of sight. She doesn't swear, but one of her nymphs does. Artemis can hardly blame her.

She holds up a hand to signify the end of the hunt, before stepping out from the bush that she'd been crouched in. As Artemis heads towards the boon, she doesn't even bother to brush the stray leaves from her hair. This is who she is, after all. The others should see her as her true self if they want her presence at all.

When she sees that the boon dons the gleaming golden shield of Athena, Artemis feels the tension in her shoulders drop, but only slightly. Perhaps Athena isn't the worst of her relatives, but the bond between the two half-sisters is still strained, both having made it clear they have little patience for each other.

Still, to ignore a summon would cause more offence than Artemis is prepared to deal with. Despite her own feelings towards her family, Artemis wouldn't risk harm coming to her nymphs or her forest by turning her nose up at a war god. Athena may not be as ruthless as Ares, but she is the very definition of cunning.

Artemis places her hand on the boon and it activates, disappearing in a blinding flash of light, before being replaced with the shimmering vision of Athena. Artemis blinks through the bright light, her eyes quickly adjusting in such a way as would be expected from the Goddess of the Hunt.

"Artemis, your presence is required on Olympus once again. Please do not hide away in your forests when you are needed."

Despite herself, Artemis's fist grips tighter on her bow.

"You accuse me! I am not hiding by performing my expected duties. Why, it would be coming up there that would be a waste-"

But the vision of Athena disappears. She's already gone. As always, the other Olympians see little room for debate when

they know that Artemis will come regardless. Being interrupted by them is almost as much part of the routine as the hunt itself...

"I suppose that I'm going then..."

In the distance, some of the nymphs watch with concern. They are no strangers to the anger that Artemis's family inflicts upon her, but the least of Artemis's desires would be to take out said anger on them. She shakes her head once more, not letting her eyes settle on the watchful gaze of Callisto in particular, lest she change her mind.

"Return to your hunts. May they be fruitful. Once I'm finished with... whatever nonsense they require me for, then I shall return."

With that, Artemis turns and stalks away, until she is shrouded, even from them.

Olympus, so bright that it stings Artemis's eyes as she walks across those wide, open halls. While Artemis would never openly wish harm upon her family's reign, whenever she comes here, the hunter inside her can't help but muse upon how difficult it would be to hide in these exposed rooms. It's fortunate that the Olympians are the strongest of all, so that they never need to worry about being hunted like a rabbit in a field.

The skies above are far from clear today, with heavy clouds rolling over each other and rumbling oppressively. That can mean only one person. The hairs on Artemis's skin prickle.

She expects him before his booming voice even carries across towards her.

"There you are, little scamp! It's a wonder there are any trials left, with how long it's taken you to get here! Now, I know you aren't as swift as Hermes, but surely you wouldn't drag your feet on a summons from your Lord Father?"

The mighty Zeus himself, in all his glimmering, so-called glory. But, while Artemis won't be openly treasonous, she doesn't let him get away with scolding her like some disobedient child.

"Athena was the one who called me, Lord Father. Had I known that the words came from you yourself, I would've been here sooner. Perhaps you should speak with her about her clarity."

A lie and a deflection. They both know it and yet posturing is the thread that weaves their family together. Zeus's expression doesn't shift even slightly to show if Artemis's words bother him or not. A buffoon he may be, but Zeus didn't become the King of the Gods for no reason at all.

"Well, no matter," he dismisses, "Now that you're here, you can join us in our endeavours."

"And what might those be?" Artemis asks.

"The underworld, of course!" Zeus bellows, placing an unwanted hand on her back to steer her, "Or had you forgotten about my young nephew's plight?"

"Zagreus?"

Upon this realisation, Artemis steps away from the sticky warmth of Zeus's hand, hurrying across the room and towards the scrying pool, where several other Olympians are waiting. Athena, as the one who called Artemis, is present, standing tall and true as she watches the shifting waters below. Dionysus lounges nearby, but nevertheless is intrigued by what's going on, as Poseidon noisily tries to make predictions with him, his own volume only drowned out by that of Zeus himself. There are other gods who have taken an interest in Zagreus - Ares, Hermes and Demeter - but Artemis doesn't see them here today. Zagreus attempts this feat so many times that he can't count on every gods' presence each time.

But he should be able to count on Artemis.

As she reaches the edge of the pool, the vision on the surface shimmers into clarity for her and Artemis can see Zagreus tearing through perilous foes with his bow. He's already reached Asphodel. That's how long it's taken her to get to him. He's even using the bow and yet she didn't offer him her aid sooner.

There is little that can make Artemis feel guilty when it comes to family, but this undoubtedly does. Zagreus and his humble quest to leave the underworld has touched each of the Olympians. Perhaps many of them are projecting onto Zagreus in their own way, but Artemis knows that her beliefs about Zagreus must be true - that he's so unsatisfied with his lot in life provided by his immediate family that he fights for something better, refusing to lie down and take it. Yes, that must be what's running through Zagreus's head right now. A feeling that Artemis herself knows all too well.

Perhaps she hates coming to Olympus, but if Athena had only

mentioned Zagreus in her message, then Artemis would've been here in an instant. Then again, should they openly discuss Zagreus in the forests, then who knows what ears could be listening. Artemis trusts her own lands, but she does understand why Athena would feel the need to be cautious. That is Athena's vast mind at work.

As Zagreus slays the last of the enemies blocking his path and takes the obol for his efforts, Artemis sees Athena stepping forward to offer a boon to the next room that the boat shall take him to. But Artemis holds up a hand to stop her. She is late enough as it is. If Artemis doesn't help now, can she help at all.

A brief irritation flashes across Athena's grey eyes, but she doesn't object.

"Very well, Artemis."

A single nod to show that she's grateful to Athena. With that, Artemis holds out her hand to the water, sending down a brilliant green blessing that few have ever received. Her sigil appears above the boat and Zagreus selects it, moving onto the next room, where Artemis has no doubt that he'll succeed and receive her blessing.

To the gods, the antics of heroes are entertainment. In a place that's timeless, they are ironically left with much time to seek out ways to spend their time. But most gods are too lazy to be active in that, especially when the heroes come to them. But Zagreus is no mere mortal hero, searching for fame that will carry his name in song for generations to come. Zagreus is also one of them. He is a god and yet... he is a little thing. The balance between how well Zagreus can manage on his own and

how much their support carries him forward is a line that's blurred, even to Artemis.

Yet each of them believes that they're the ones helping Zagreus most of all. That their blessings shall be the ones that deliver him to their noble hall. Artemis would like to claim that she's exempt from this arrogance, but even so...

...There!

The room is cleared and now nothing stands between Zagreus and the boon that shall be gifted to him from Artemis. His hand presses against the green orb in front of him and then... It's time for Artemis to do her duty.

The only duty to her family that she doesn't begrudge. Artemis's aid to Zagreus.

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